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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: NEW TRANSPORT MINISTER FOCUSED ON
INFRASTRUCTURE

¶1. (SBU) On October 30, Ambassador Ordway met the new Minister of Transport and Communications Serik Akhmetov. Akhmetov expressed an intention to continue developing transport infrastructure to capitalize on Kazakhstan's advantageous geographic position as a natural land bridge between China and Europe. He said the Ministry is seeking to bring competition to heretofore monopolistic sectors, citing the state-owned railroad company, Kazakhstan Temir Zholy as an example. Akhmetov emphasized building additional railroad links "to connect central and southern Kazakhstan to the west" and mentioned inaugurating a four-lane Astana-Karagandy-Almaty highway in 2008. Also in the works are plans for refurbishing the airports of Aktube, Shymkent, and Pavlodar as well as building a new terminal at the Aktau Airport.

¶2. (SBU) Akhmetov, 48, replaces Askar Mamin (now Akim of Astana) and comes to the Ministry after heading the "Atameken" National Union of Entrepreneurs and Employers. He holds a doctorate in Economics and brings experience of working in the Presidential Administration, the Astana City Akimat, and as the Akim of Temirtau, his native city in the Karaganda Oblast.

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